

National Guard's Hall
518-520 Race Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1015

HABS
PA
51-PHILA
245-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
120 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

NATIONAL GUARD'S HALL

HABS
PA

51-PHILA

245

Street Address
or Location:518-520 Race Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia
County, PennsylvaniaPresent Owner:

Demolished June 1959

Brief Statement of
Significance:

The National Guard's Hall (also called the Armory of the National Guards) was one of the focal points of military activity in Philadelphia during the Civil War [see the "Military Map of Philadelphia, 1861-1865" included in Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (Philadelphia: 1913) by Frank H. Taylor]. Occupied for a time as a United States army hospital [Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: 1884), vol. 2, p. 1019 ff.], it was also the destination point of military parades, the scene of much patriotic speechmaking, and the welcome and dismissal point for troops either on furlough or at the end of enlistment [Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: 1884), vol. 1, pp. 810, 817, 818]. The "grand saloon" on the second floor served not only for military gatherings, but was occasionally the scene of lectures, fairs, concerts, balls, and various meetings [Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: 1884), vol. 2, pp. 980, 1019 ff.]. According to its dedication orator, Colonel John W. Farney, this hall was "one of the finest military edifices in our Union, and the only one ever erected by a single volunteer company ... a temple of the citizen soldier ..." [Public Ledger, Philadelphia, November 17, 1857, p. 1, c. 3].

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Incorporated by act of April 9, 1856, for the purpose of erecting an armory for their own use, the "Infantry Corps of National Guards of the City of Philadelphia," had at that time been in existence as a militia unit for over fifteen years. It was originally organized "principally among persons engaged in the transportation service of the State on the Columbia Railroad" living in the district of Spring Garden on December 11, 1840. Thomas Tustin was elected the company's first captain, followed by Stephen B. Kingston (1845), and Peter Lyle (1847).

The corps prospered and, in 1860, was reformed into the Second Regiment with eight companies and Peter Lyle as Colonel. After a three months' tour of duty early in 1861, the regiment, in August of that year, began three years' enlistment in the Union Army as the Ninetieth Pennsylvania Volunteers (also designated Ninetieth Regiment Infantry [see Taylor, Frank H., Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (Philadelphia: 1913), p. 108]), Colonel Peter Lyle, commanding. During the Civil War this regiment fought in most of the major eastern battles, as well as countless minor engagements [Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia, vol. 2, p. 1019 ff.]. It was mustered out of the army November 26, 1864, and returned to Philadelphia for dismissal at its own armory [Bates, Samuel P., History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5 (Harrisburg: c. 1870), vol. 3, pp. 157-8]. Further research is needed to follow the organization's activities, as well as the building's history, after the War.

The armory was sold by the Infantry Corps of National Guards (they retained their corporation name, legally at least) to the Fire Association of Philadelphia by sheriff's deed of June 12, 1897 [Sheriff's Deed Book 170, p. 56]. This latter corporation, which retained title until 1909, probably held the building as rental property. Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1901 lists it as occupied by the firm of Hall and Carpenter, "tin plate and metals." In 1909, Zachary T. Hall, of Hall and Carpenter, acquired the property. It served as a sheet metal shop until sold to the General State Authority for demolition in 1958.

2. Date of erection: Cornerstone laid September 17, 1856; building dedicated November 16, 1857.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No original drawings have been found.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Small central balcony at third story, front (north) elevation, and tower above had been removed at an unknown date.
6. Important old views and references:
Old views:
 - a. A reproduction of an original drawing showing the Armory's north elevation by Frank H. Taylor is in his book, Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865, opposite page 40. (Location of original unknown.)
 - b. An early drawing entitled "National Guard's Hall" (reproduced from Castner Collection, vol. 2, p. 18, in the Print Room, Free Library of Philadelphia, Logan Square) is included in this survey. Original source unknown.

References:

- a. Bates, Samuel P., History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5, 5 vols. (Harrisburg: c. 1870). History of Ninetieth Pennsylvania Volunteers during the Civil War: vol. 3, pp. 151-185.
- b. Public Ledger, Philadelphia, September, 1856, and November, 1857.
- c. Records of the City of Philadelphia (Registry of Deeds, City Hall, Philadelphia).
- d. Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: 1884).
- e. Taylor, Frank H., Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (Philadelphia: 1913).

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: At a meeting held in the armory on August 29, 1861, a resolution was passed offering the regiment's services to the Union. Thus the Ninetieth Regiment Infantry (also designated Ninetieth Pennsylvania Volunteers [see Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia, vol. 2, p. 1019 ff.] entered the Civil War [Taylor, Frank H., Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865, p. 108].

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Photograph and Print Collection, and other source material, in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Thirteenth and Locust Streets, Philadelphia.

D. Supplemental Material:

1. The following is quoted from the Philadelphia Public Ledger, September 18, 1856, p. 1, c. 1:

Corner Stone Laid -- Military Display. Yesterday afternoon the corner stone of the new Armory for the National Guards, in Race street, between Fifth and Sixth, was laid with appropriate and interesting ceremonies. The line of military, composed of the National Guards, Scott Legion, Philadelphia Cavalry and Washington Blues, formed at four o'clock on Washington Square, and then moved up Fifth street under command of Col. James Page. The companies participating turned out in full numbers and made altogether one of the finest military displays we have had for some time. They attracted much attention from the large assemblage of persons attending the Democratic meeting in Independence Square. Peter McCall, Esq, delivered an appropriate oration on the laying of the corner stone.

2. The following is quoted from the Public Ledger, November 16, 1857, p. 1, c. 3:

Dedication of the New Armory of the National Guards -- The large and splendid new Armory, just finished for the National Guards, in Race Street, near Sixth, will be dedicated to day... The new armory is one of the finest buildings of the kind in the Union. The corner stone was laid on the 7th of September [sic], 1856. The building is of the most substantial character, the walls being 22 inches in

thickness. The grand saloon, on the second floor, is 60 by 130 feet; the walls are divided into panels by the pilasters which support the girders of the armory floor. The panels are decorated with heraldic /sic/ escutcheons, and surmounted with circular cornices, bearing the gas fixtures. The ceiling is 27 feet high, of segment or arched form, drab and blue; the walls, ceiling and furniture harmonize in color. The entire third story is appropriated to the use of the company, and the army saloon is a splendid and unique apartment. The walls are tinted in imitation of granite. The ceiling, which is 22 feet high, is empanelled in ten divisions, painted in fresco. The rafters are ornamented with bosses, from each of which two chandeliers are hung. There are seventeen musket racks, each containing twelve muskets, and there are also closets for the equipment of 200 men, each one having the name of the member on a silver plate attached to his closet. The saloon will be formally opened tomorrow evening, by a grand ball, to be given by the company.

3. The following is quoted from the Public Ledger, November 17, 1857, p. 1, c. 3:

Dedication of the New Armory of the National Guards - Grand Military Display -- The splendid new armory, built for the National Guards, in Race street, near Sixth, was dedicated yesterday with appropriate ceremonies. The occasion was made one of a grand military display, one of the finest, notwithstanding the rain, that we have had in our city for many years, twenty two companies, many of them with full ranks having united to do honor to the occasion. The division formed on Broad street, the right resting on Chestnut, under the command of Gen. Cadwalader, and proceeded down Chestnut to Second street, up Second to Race, and up Race to the armory.

. . .

When the head of the line reached the armory the companies opened ranks and stacked their arms in the middle of the street. When /sic/ the companies again formed and marched into the grand saloon of the building, which was brilliantly lighted. The military formed in close order while the spectators ranged around the room, and invited guests were seated upon the platform. From this place the coup d'oeil was most grand and striking, the combination of uniforms and the magnificence of the room made up a scene perhaps never equalled.

The order of exercises in the saloon was as follows: National Melody, by Beck's Band; Prayer by the Rev. Dr. Meyers; Priests Chorus, from the opera of the Magic Flute; then followed the oration, by Col. John W. Farney.

. . .

After which a Dedicatory March, composed by M. F. Aledo, and dedicated to the National Guards, was performed by the Philadelphia Band.

4. The following is quoted from Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia:1884), Vol. 2, p. 1019 ff.:

Under this authority [act of incorporation of April, 1856] the company, in the year 1857 [sic; Cf. Jacob K. Sulger to Infantry Corps...., Oct. 16, 1856 (Deed Book RDW 96, p. 178:City Records of Philadelphia)], purchased a lot of ground on the south side of Race Street, between Fifth and Sixth, being sixty feet front and one hundred and thirty feet deep. A large, high three story brick building was erected, occupying the entire lot, and quite imposing in appearance. On the first floor the passageway is in the middle. On each side are rooms for officer's regimental headquarters, reading- and writing-rooms, drilling, dressing, meeting, and store rooms. On the second floor is a large hall with a high ceiling, occupying nearly the whole space from Race Street to Cresson's Alley. It has been used for a drill-room and other regimental purposes, inspections, and occasionally as a public hall for lectures, fairs, concerts, and meetings. The third story is a large drill- and equipment-room for company accommodations. This building, popularly known as the National Guard's Hall, cost with the ground a large amount of money. It was not only the muster-place of the regiment for the three month's service during the war, but also for a three years' regimental organization, and during a portion of the war was occupied as a United States army hospital....

Prepared by James F. O'Gorman, Architect
National Park Service - August 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest: This elegantly decorated headquarters and armory is a reflection of the pre-1861 outlook toward the military, an opinion which changed rapidly during the Civil War. A handsomely proportioned and restrained example of mid-19th century building.
Structural interest: A 60-foot span, timber and iron, Howe truss supported the third floor and hung, segmental-arched ceiling of second story "saloon."

2. Condition of fabric: Demolished June 1959

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Rectangular - 60 feet by 130 feet, three stories.
2. Foundations: Unknown.

3. Wall construction: Brick.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: None of interest.
5. Chimneys: Unknown.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Original, with some possible minor alterations.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Original.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Unknown.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Original.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas: None.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

For interior descriptions, see Supplemental Material, Part I, D of this report.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building faced north, located on the south side of Race Street, between Fifth and Sixth.
2. Enclosures, outbuildings, walks, landscaping: None.

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